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Richmond residents revolted by ravenous rodents

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RICHMOND -- Rats are not only scurrying around the local elementary school. The furry fellows also have been seen in Richmond homes and vehicles. And no one knows where they're coming from.

"The rat population in Richmond seems to be quite large for some reason," said Charles Fyfe of Envirocare Pest Control in Gardiner.

Fyfe said Tuesday he has received a dozen calls from people in Richmond asking what to do about the rats they're seeing in around their homes and businesses.

"When they're competing for food, they'll scout the territory and you'll find them in unusual places, like car engines," he said.

Just ask Tracy Tuttle.

Tuttle, owner of Kennebec Cutters & Co., said the rodents took up residence in a tenant's vehicle.

The tenant lived above her hair salon on Main Street and was away serving in Iraq when rats moved in and chewed up the car interior and wires in the engine.

"They were doing some exterminating in the RBMC (Richmond Business and Manufacturing Center) next door, and I don't know if they came over or what, but we had a little family move into the vehicle," Tuttle said.

Tuttle called Fyfe, who took care of the problem with bar bait, an all-weather rat and mouse killer.

Fyfe said rats have been known to migrate long distances in search of food when their supply has been depleted.

Examples of this would be when an operating farm shuts down or a landfill closes.

"If they're seeing them in the daytime, yes, they have a major problem," he said of Richmond. "Rats are very shy and secretive, so they've either been disturbed or the population is so large they have to hunt for food as much as possible."

Tuttle said she had concerns about a dumpster next door to her hair salon belonging to a seafood-processing business called Shucks Maine Lobster. She said the dumpster was infested with maggots and she has seen coyotes hanging around it.

Fyfe said he couldn't confirm her suspicions.

Richmond Code Enforcement Officer Douglas Marble, who also is the town's health officer, said many people have complained to him about the smell from the dumpster.

But the business has since contracted with someone to haul the lobster shells away for compost, he said.

A better guess, he said, would be Daniel Nobel's farm across the street from the Marcia Buker School on High Street. School officials called in an exterminator to rid the building of rats that moved in over the summer.

"It's a 143-acre farm and it's across the street from the school," Marble said. "I've been told he sold off the development rights to the farm, but I'm not sure who lives there now. I don't know the whole story with that."

Attempts to reach Nobel for comment were unsuccessful.

Another possibility, Marble said, could be the sewer system project that has been going on all summer. Old, rusty pipes are being ripped out and new ones installed. The work could have disturbed the rats natural habitat, he said.

Marble said he has already put a call in to the Sagadahoc County Board of Health to get help with what he said could be a townwide problem.

Meanwhile, Deborah Soule, Marcia Buker School principal, said she and her staff will continue to be vigilant in keeping food in closed jars and containers until the rats in her building can be eliminated.

Superintendent Martha Witham said rodents at the school are a minor infestation that is being controlled.

"We actually had a man from the pesticide control board stop in today and he said, 'You're fine and you're doing what you're suppose to do,' " Witham said. "Ed Antz also called from the Department of Education and he said 'You're doing fine as long as you're open with the public.' And we're doing everything we can to keep the people informed."

Ray Connors, acting chief of compliance at the Maine Board of Pesticides Control, said school officials took the right steps in dealing with the problem.

"I'd say they're doing the responsible thing," Connors said. "There's a minor rodent problem that's developed and they did their research to see what's required for state guidelines and rules and regulations and they're following that."

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